

**In the claims:**

Please amend claims 1, 21, and 42 to read as follows:

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1. (Three Times Amended) A method for the preparation of a linear phosphorus-linked oligomer comprising the steps of:
- (a) providing a solid support;
  - (b) attaching a 5'-O-protected nucleoside to the solid support;
  - (c) deprotecting the 5'-hydroxyl of the nucleoside with a deprotecting reagent comprising a protic acid in a solvent to deprotect the 5'-hydroxyl of the nucleoside, wherein the solvent consists essentially of an aromatic solvent, an alkyl aromatic solvent, a halogenated aromatic solvent, a halogenated alkyl aromatic solvent, or an aromatic ether solvent;
  - (d) reacting the deprotected 5'-hydroxyl with an 5'-protected activated phosphorus compound to produce a covalent linkage therebetween;
  - (e) oxidizing or sulfurizing the covalent linkage to form a phosphodiester, phosphorothioate, phosphorodithioate or H-phosphonate linkage;
  - (f) repeating steps c through e at least once for subsequent couplings of additional activated phosphorus compounds, to produce the completed phosphorus-linked oligomer; and
  - (g) cleaving the oligomer from the solid support;
- wherein steps (b) through (f) are performed with an automated device;
- wherein said oligomer is a linear oligomer.
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21. (Twice Amended) A method for the preparation of a linear phosphorus-linked oligomer comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a solid support;
- (b) attaching a 5'-O-protected nucleoside to the solid support;
- (c) contacting the protected 5'-hydroxyl of the nucleoside with a deprotecting reagent comprising a protic acid in a solvent to deprotect the 5'-hydroxyl of the nucleoside, wherein the solvent consists essentially of an aromatic solvent, an alkyl aromatic solvent, a halogenated aromatic solvent, a halogenated alkyl aromatic solvent, or an aromatic ether solvent;
- (d) reacting the deprotected 5'-hydroxyl with a 5'-protected activated phosphite compound to produce a phosphite linkage;
- (e) oxidizing or sulfurizing the phosphite linkage to form a phosphodiester, phosphorothioate, or phosphorodithioate linkage;
- (f) repeating steps c through e at least once for subsequent couplings of additional activated phosphite compounds, to produce the completed phosphorus-linked oligomer; and
- (g) cleaving the oligomer from the solid support;

wherein steps (b) through (f) are performed with an automated device;  
wherein said oligomer is a linear oligomer.

42. (Twice Amended) A method for the preparation of a linear phosphorus-linked oligomer comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a solid support;
- (b) attaching a 5'-O-protected nucleoside to the solid support;
- (c) deprotecting the 5'-hydroxyl of the nucleoside with a deprotecting reagent comprising dichloroacetic acid in toluene;